

March 8, 2007
4:10PM

Memorandum on Iraq Supplemental struggle among Democrats: how it looks on Thursday.

According to exit polls, voters voted in November 2006 for a Congress that would end the war. They didn't get it.

In some cases they voted against Republicans, particularly Senator Chafee, who were dovish, in order to get a Democratic majority in the Senate. In other cases, evidently, they voted for Democrats in the House who did not promise an early end to the war, for the same reason: to get a Democratic majority that would go against the views of these Blue Dog candidates. This, it appears as of today, they did not get.

Judging by the draft supplemental legislation unveiled by the Democratic leadership in a press conference this morning, the leaders are pressing a bill that will not shorten the war and scarcely pretends to.

The provisions aimed at avoiding the surge escalation by restricting the kinds of troops that could be sent over, in terms of their readiness, have been in effect jettisoned by allowing the President to waive these restrictions. This approach launched by Murtha a few weeks ago was always dubious on practical and constitutional grounds as "micro-managing" the war and unduly restricting the president's ability to continue and conduct it, as long as Congress permitted him to do so. Likewise, provisions in the current draft that call for "benchmarks" to be met by the Iraqi government will have no practical effect. Judgment to whether the benchmarks have been met is left to the president. There is no mechanism for questioning his judgment on this, and no process of enforcement if the benchmarks are not met.

Supposedly this proposal calls for beginning to remove troops from Iraq in July or October if benchmarks "are not met" and by the end of 2008, if they are. But this approach blatantly lacks any promise of removing troops from Iraq even in a year and a half.

For some time, it has been obvious that there were not votes in Congress, despite the Democratic majority, to do what the Progressive Caucus and the Out-of-Iraq Caucus want, which is to cut-off funding for operations in Iraq except for a "fully-funded, safe, systematic withdrawal" by the end of the year. Therefore, it is foreseeable that the 93 billion dollar supplemental bill will almost surely pass the Congress. The question at this moment is whether that will happen with the approval and encouragement of the Democratic leadership and the great majority of the Democrats.

As for the leaders, the answer seems to be 'yes.' That means that with the Democratic leadership fully supporting the continuation of Bush's war, it can from thenceforth aptly

be described as Pelosi's war as well. If she brings the great majority of Democrats with her, as she clearly wants to do, it will be more broadly from now on, the Democrats' war just as much as the Republicans' war.

Apparently the Democratic majority includes too many Democrats—not only the Blue Dog Democrats—who either do not want to see the American war ending by the end of this war or-- probably a larger number-- who are unwilling to shoulder the responsibility for ending it. The latter are prepared to wait for Bush himself to take that whole responsibility or for Republicans to press him to do it. Neither of these has any prospect whatsoever of occurring in Bush's term. So these Democrats simply prefer to see more troops be sent over, more Americans dying and killing in the next twenty months and longer, than to risk facing charges of having lost a war.

Such charges are to be foreseen against whoever it is who does end the war. That means, as the Progressive Caucus members said this morning, that probably no president—Democrat or Republican—will choose to bear that responsibility by himself. That means that only Congress can end the war and that in turn is highly unlikely for a Congress controlled by the same party as the president. That would apply to the Democratic Congress under a Democratic president that the current Democratic leaders hope for in 2009. Unlikely as it may be by present indications that this Congress will take on that responsibility, these twenty months may represent the only real opportunity to see a funding timetable set for ending American involvement.

I have been exploring in the last week the possibility of including a Boland-type amendment that would cut off funding for an attack on Iran, at least without further authorization by Congress. Senator James Webb is about to introduce a stand-alone bill in the Senate to this effect, which he proposes to try to add as an amendment to the supplemental bill when it reaches the Senate. Something like that may still occur in the House. Barbara Lee, Lynn Woolsey, Conyers and Maxine Waters do have a stand-alone resolution to that effect.

It would be much more powerful for this to be included in the supplemental, which is hard for the president to veto. If it were left as a stand-alone bill, it would surely be vetoed by the president even if it passed and Congress would be unlikely to override his veto. In any case, he would probably issue a signing statement (rather than veto), indicating his rejection of this budget restraint. However, it is at last possible that by this time and on this issue there would be a congressional reaction to such a signing statement, challenging the general constitutionality of such a practice and even threatening impeachment.

There seems no will by either side in the controversy to include this provision in the Supplemental, as passed by the Appropriations Committee. I infer that peace groups and the progressive and out-of-Iraq Caucuses would prefer that such a provision not be included at all in the draft legislation lest it tempt members to vote for the Supplemental, even without any timetable on funding and they want to maximize votes against such a bill. I am personally sorry to see the opportunity pass for a decisive rejection of funding

Tom's addition:

The complicated thing with this is that UPFJ, no matter what the votes are, are going to urge people to vote against the supplemental and I'm 100% certain they won't move on that even though they are concerned with Iran.

In agreement of the bill so that it is on the record. But that is precisely the bill that the Republicans are trying to get voted on a few weeks ago and what the Democrats were dodging because they don't want to vote on the bill because they don't want to reveal how low support for that is at this point. My impression is that that will support the President.

Tom: I thought it was different. They don't want to be perceived as cutting off the funds for the troops.

The don't want any Democrats on the record on cutting off funds for the troops..

DE: If that could pass, I would still say Iran has higher priority. But if that would pass, I would be for it for sure. You could pass Iran as a free-standing war if you could cut-off that.

The peace movement can say, you can vote against the supplemental and for ... My only concern is that provision goes on with the supplemental and gets passed. My impression is that nothing can impact Iraq at this point.

Tom:

Encourage not to vote on supplemental—take your stance against more funding of Iraq and against attack on iran.

They will refrain from telling people not to vote for this ill; but this won't effect it passing; but if there is an effect on Iran, it won't be through the peace movement but those who are exerting pressure on Pelosi and Murtha

I don't see any problem of getting people with conceivable influence on Pelosi and other members of the committee to ensure that this is on the supplemental. They are even backing off of cutting funding from Iraq and I

have an unease about that—I don't think the Congress can go far in affecting strategy of war;

Mort agrees with Scott Ritter that the president and Cheney believe, amazingly, that a decapitating strike against the theocratic regime in Iran would bring about a favorable regime change and that this is why they are determined to attack. Mort has believed this for the past two years.